



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

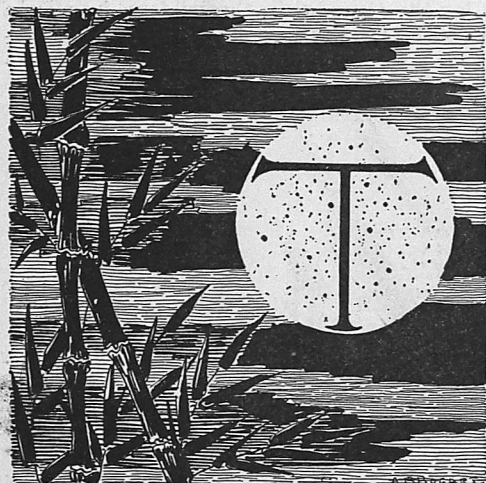
Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE BAMBOO.

By P. HORDERN.

"Even the sun himself, with all his power, cannot throw light into the dark hollows of the bamboo."—*Burmese Classic.*



HERE is a plant which, wild as it is, and sown broadcast over whole continents, yields to none in a graceful beauty, which rises at times even to grander, yet whose nature is so versatile, whose homely uses are so many, that to it has been given a wholly exceptional power to influence the life, and even in some ways to determine the

character of the people who live under its shade. Throughout the vast regions of the Eastern hemisphere the bamboo is truly man's familiar friend. There are countries where it seems to supply almost every human requirement, and where the feathery masses of its foliage drooping like the weeping-willow over road and river and village, bespeak an ideal of life beyond the reach of less primitive communities. Here man is unspoiled by artificial wants, untouched by the march of thought or of science, and nature unsolicited supplies with lavish hand his simple needs. It is an ideal which it seems almost sacrilege to disturb, and in presence of which the highest aim of the foreign intruder should be to preserve its primary conditions intact. No better example can be cited of the land of the bamboo than those of Indo-Chinese provinces, of which Burma is the best known to Europeans.

Like the fir in northern climates, it is the bamboo which here gives an unmistakable stamp to the rural landscape, while it is literally the framework and foundation of nearly every work of man. It is no exaggeration to say that the same jungles which give color to wild animal life of every form and tribe, exert a beneficial influence also on every step of the life of their human inhabitants.

The Burmese child plays with bamboo toys in a house of which roof and walls and floor are for the most part made from the same generous plant. Through boyhood and manhood and old age this helpful comrade is ever at his side. On land or water, in peace or war, in the home of the rich and poor, in art and manufactures, in the market and in the field, at feast and funeral, that is the substance of all that man most needs and values for ornament or use. Towns and villages are built from its stems and leaves; the fisherman's rod and float and raft; the hunter's snare; it bridges the torrent, bears water from the well and irrigates the fields. It is food and medicine for cattle, and even for men; and there is music, too, not only in the rustle of its leaves, but in its woody heart, from which more than one musical instrument is made.

Let a brief tribute here be paid to the outward beauty of this strangely gifted plant. In all the vegetation of the tropics, among palms and tree-ferns and towering forest-trees, nothing will be found with a more attractive grace than the bamboo grove, such as shadows mile after mile of the Burmese country road or creek. Springing from the earth on either side in closely serried clusters the smooth green stems, jointed at regular intervals, taper upwards in an arc which can hardly be seen to leave the perpendicular, till at a height of perhaps a hundred feet they are lost in a tracery of delicate foliage, where the branches meet overhead and cast a dense cool shade on the roadway below.

It is impossible to traverse these living gothic aisles without a deep impression of their grandeur. Often in sight of some dazzling sunset, of crystal cave, or rainbow among mountain lakes, —thought can find expression only by comparison with building, or painting, or pageant of the stage; and to me the silent stateliness of the bamboo grove has always most recalled the sense of vastness, of symmetry, and of incomparable finish which, in such a building as St. Peter's at Rome, strike the mind with unfeigned and unexpected awe.

And as the face is the index of the mind, so the external beauty of the bamboo forest covers a train of characteristics by which every unit of which it is composed is adapted to practical utility in a thousand ways.

To note something of the physical structure of the bamboo, and a few of its most common uses, will be to give some conception of the wealth of its resources. In observing its nature, the difference between the male and female plant will be at once noticed. In the male bamboo, the substance of the stem is solid throughout, and light though it is, there is no stronger or tougher staff than that on which the old man leans in Burma or Siam, or that with which in these countries, men take the law into their own hands and administer the summary punishment known as "bamboo backshish."

But it is from the far more abundant branches of the female plant that the wants of mankind are so bountifully supplied. Built like a modern man-of-war in water-tight compartments, each joint of the stem is separated from the next on either side by a thick solid partition; and it would be hard to describe how this simple construction adapts it to practical use, or how much may be manufactured with ease from a single stem. To make a water-bucket, for example, it is only necessary to cut off a length of the branch near the root, where the girth is large, leaving the bulk-head at one end untouched. With a handle easily made from the higher parts of the same branch, the bucket is complete—finished and polished by nature, lighter and probably more water-tight, and better fitted for rough usage than any manufactured rival. In the same way, at the extremity of the branch, are to be found—almost ready-made thimbles—thimbles and pipe-bowls and pipe-stems of any size required.

The same tubes, if split perpendicularly at regular intervals without being cut through, may be flattened out so as to form an almost level flooring for boat or cottage. Endless other illustrations may be given of the marvellous way in which the bamboo, by its generous and ever-ready help, seems to court the friendship of man.

If the houses in a Burmese village are largely built of bamboo materials, nearly everything within them seems to come ultimately from the same source. Beds and furniture, matting and sun-shades, bird cages and baskets, fans and umbrellas, all owe their chief substance to the bamboo; while in a land where lacquer so largely takes the place of earthenware, the same material is conspicuous as the groundwork of unnumbered household vessels—from the laborer's rice platter, bought for a few pence to the costly vase or betel-box of pliant texture and finest polish. In all alike the lacquer, which gives to each vessel its charm of color or finish, is laid over a framework of fine bamboo wicker. Then, if we leave the house for field or river, we are met everywhere by the same ubiquitous material. It is this which, either as stout railing or living hedge, encloses the garden or field. With this the villager climbs the toddy-palm in quaint shoes made for the purpose. His shelter in the country cart, in his boat it is transformed into masts and yards and decks and awnings, and forms the main part of the permanent structures in which whole families live for months together on a Burmese river.

In war, too, no less than in peace, the bamboo holds an honorable place. The main strength of many a formidable stockade of the *cheveaux de frise* of stout pointed bamboo. It serves for flagstaff and spear-shaft and sword-sheath, and even for one of the most telling weapons of offense. In front of every position of the enemy in a Burmese park among mimosa-thorns and grass and scrub, the ground is sown with invisible caltrops in the form of simple sharp-pointed lengths of split bamboo—a weapon inflicting deep poisonous wounds, and which proves more harassing to infantry, whether in skirmish or charge, than any valor of the enemy, or any natural strength of earthwork or stockade.

But it is not for the natives of the country only that the favors of the bamboo are reserved. As the sun shines on the evil and on the good, so the bamboo is the faithful servant of the foreigner no less than of its own countrymen.

It is a well-known characteristic of Burma, as compared with most Indian provinces, that the traveller in rural districts has no need to burden himself with tents. This is partly owing to Buddhist liberality, which gives free shelter in monasteries, and in frequent rest-houses, built as works of religious merit. But no less thanks are due to nature also, which plants at every turn the inexhaustible bamboo groves, from which, with no other aid than a woodman's knife, may be made all that the traveler needs for use or comfort. Owing to the universal presence of this invaluable plant, there is no country where barracks and

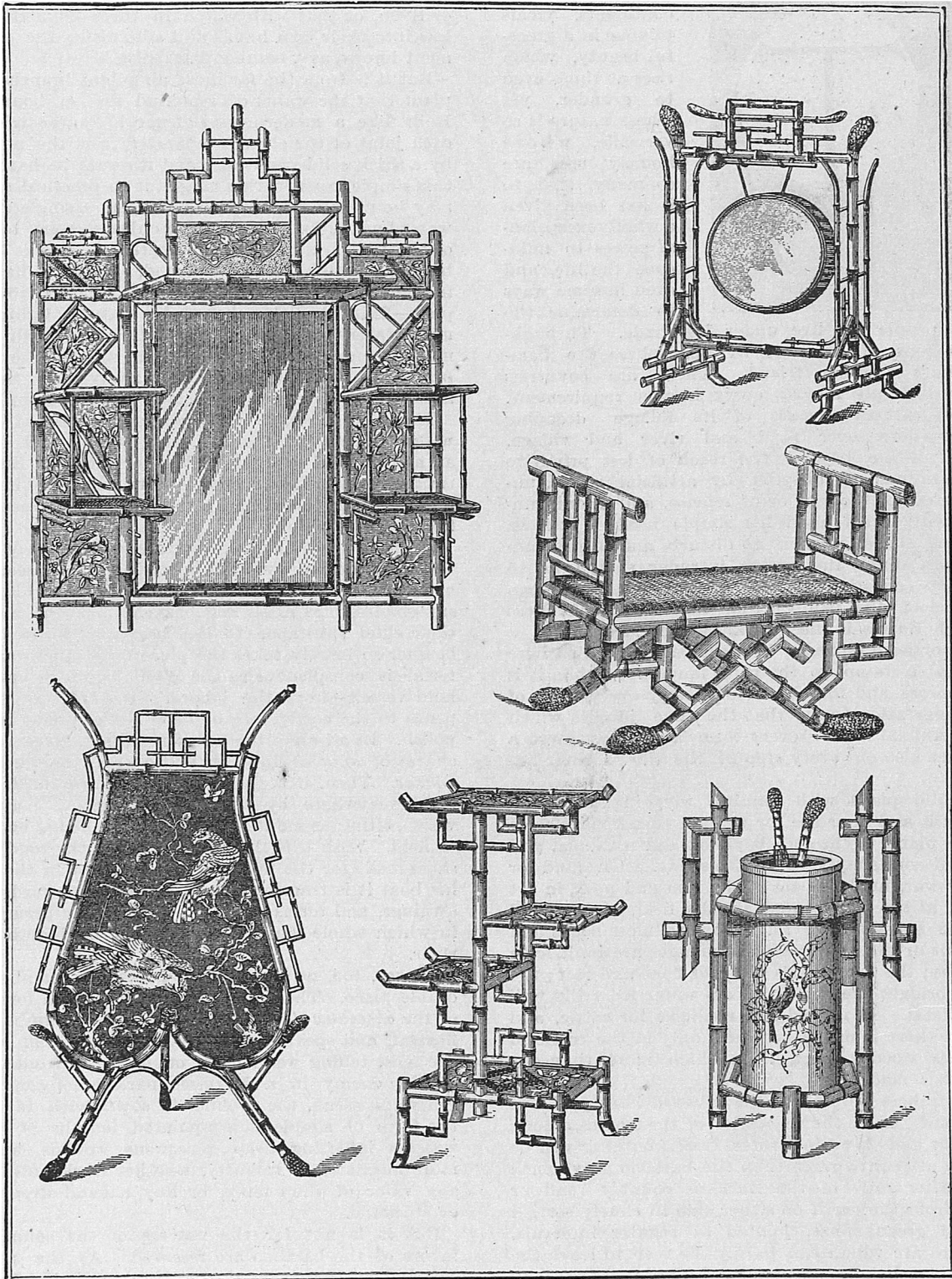


## THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

hospitals, houses and offices, stables and outbuildings, can be so quickly and cheaply, and even substantially constructed; and there is not an emergency, great or small, in which in the Englishman's house, in such a country, the services of the bamboo are not the instant and effective resource.

If temporary shelter is needed for man or beast; if unexpected visitors descend with a host of followers, in a few hours they may be as comfortably housed as if they had been long expected. If fuel is wanted for cooking, stakes or trellis for the gar-

carver with material admirably suited to his art. Its hollow tubes seem made for water-pipes, its dry fibrous leaves for thatch. Its lightness adapts it for ladders and scaffolding; and the ease with which it splits, into layers of any thickness, for the weaving of matting and for basket-work of every kind. Lavishly as iron is strewn under the feet of more hardy nations, there is thus provided for the Oriental in the wildest jungles, a no less abundant store of simple wealth, suited to his special requirements, responding readily to the slightest effort, and en-



SOME SPECIMENS OF BAMBOO FURNITURE.

den; if a tobacco-pipe has to be cleaned, even if needles and thread are exhausted, the bamboo will supply what is wanted with a readiness which would hardly be believed.

Truly a wonderful material it is, lending itself by every quality of its nature to the special service of man. Its larger stems combine strength and lightness in a manner equalled by neither timber nor metal. Its lighter branches bend to carry the laborer's baskets, its joints invite the manufacture of cups and buckets. Its toughness and polished smoothness provide the

couraging the exercise of every form of ingenuity.

My sketch may fitly close with the mention of a phase of Burmese national life, than which none is more characteristic, and which may be said to depend on the bamboo for its very origin and maintenance. In the easy round of Burmese existence, there is no occasion too trivial or too grave for the display of a form of native skill unique in kind, in harmony with the national mind, and especially attractive to the foreign observer. This is the art by which, with marvellous dexterity,

## THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

they delight to manufacture every fantastic form of figure and structure which the popular mind of an imaginative people can conceive.

In no city of the Empire, does the Indian Viceroy make his progress through triumphal arches of such exceptional taste and quaintness as those which adorn the Burmese capital. Nowhere in the world is the funeral pageant at once so solemn and so free from the dismal gloom by which the ceremonies of a Western burial are so commonly disfigured. The coffin, overlaid with

But the lightest pretext is enough in this country to set busy fingers to work, weaving in endless succession, to the dictation of a wild fancy, the mystic dragons and angels, the airy palaces and castles, monasteries and pagodas of fantastic beauty, tigers and elephants, boats and rafts, princes and clowns, which give so rare a charm to the spectacle of Burmese marriage feast or religious procession, and especially to that of the popular drama. And again in every scene alike, at the foundation of things, the cause and essence of art and its expression, is found



DESIGN FOR A CARVED PANEL. SUBJECT—VENUS AND CUPID.

gildings and rich mouldings of brilliant color, is borne on a gaily decorated car, shadowed by golden umbrellas and studded with figures of angels and mythical creatures of many forms. The triumphal progress of the funeral is at least in outward accord with the spirit which breaths in our own burial service, which thanks God for the deliverance of the departed, but which with us seems too often contradicted by the sombre indications of a hopeless grief at variance with the professions of our faith.

the same living substance. It is this, as we have seen, which has furnished material for the houses of both players and spectators, and for almost all that they contain, and it is from the wands and strips and pillars of the ever-present bamboo that even the fanciful creations of Eastern imagination are woven into tasteful and tangible existence.

Its use among western peoples in manufacturing articles of furniture therefrom is becoming daily more widespread, and we present our readers with some illustrations of bamboo furniture.